

REPORT

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

IN ANSWER

To a resolution of the Senate of March 14, 1845, in reference to the strengthening of the fortification at the outlet of Lake Huron, called Fort Gratiot.

DECEMBER 4, 1845.

Read, and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT, *December 3, 1845.*

SIR: In answer to a resolution of the Senate of the United States of the 14th of March last, requiring the Secretary of War to report to the Senate, "at the commencement of the next session of Congress, whether any, and if any, what further works are necessary or expedient for the enlargement and strengthening of the fortification at the outlet of Lake Huron, called Fort Gratiot, together with an estimate of the expense of such additional works as may be recommended," I respectfully transmit herewith a report of the chief of the corps of engineers, which, it is believed, contains all the information required by the resolution.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. L. MARCY,
Secretary of War.

HON. GEORGE M. DALLAS,

*Vice President of the United States
and President of the Senate.*

ENGINEER DEPARTMENT,
Washington, November 10, 1845.

SIR: By your direction, I have the honor to submit the following report, in answer to a resolution of the Senate of the 14th March last. The resolution is in the following words:

"*Resolved*, That the Secretary of War be directed to report to the Senate, at the commencement of the next session of Congress, whether any, and if any, what further works are necessary or expedient for the enlargement and strengthening of the fortification at the outlet of Lake Huron, called Fort Gratiot; together with an estimate of the expense of such additional works as may be recommended.

"Attest:

ASBURY DICKINS, *Secretary.*"

A board of officers assembled in 1840, to consider the subject of the defence of the northern frontier, thus express themselves :

" Without entering fully into the military details of the subject, which might be deemed somewhat out of place here, regarding the object of the resolution, which seems to look rather to the expense involved, the board will proceed to enumerate the works of defence deemed necessary on the northern frontier, beginning at Lake Superior ; merely glancing at the effects and advantages which are likely to result from the establishment of these works." After speaking of "*fort at falls of St. Mary,*" and "*fort at Michilimackinac,*" the report proceeds :

" *Fort at the foot of Lake Huron.*—A work here will control the outlet of Lake Huron, and interrupt the navigation between that and Lake St. Clair and the river Detroit. It will serve, also, to cover the settlements on that part of the frontier, and form a rallying point for the neighboring militia for local defence.

" Estimated expense, \$50,000."

Further on, the board say, " that in the preparation of the estimate submitted, they have not attempted to aim at precision. Hence the amount stated for the various objects are to be regarded only as approximation. They could not be any thing more, on the data used, which, for want of minute surveys and reconnoissances, were necessarily vague."

From the above extracts, it appears that the defence of the outlet of Lake Huron was recommended to the government by a special board of officers more than five years ago ; and it will be seen in the public documents containing their report, (document 206, 26th Congress, 1st session, House of Representatives,) that their views were favorably presented to Congress by the Secretary of War.

The fort now standing at the outlet of Lake Huron, namely, Fort Gratiot, mentioned in the resolution of the Senate, consists of a mere enclosure of palisades, without ditch or rampart. It is nothing, indeed, but a wooden fence, surrounding wooden quarters and barracks, affording no artillery fire of its own upon the water or the land, and being proof neither against shells nor guns of the smallest calibre. It has, accordingly, been designed to reconstruct this fort in such a manner that it shall present a strong battery upon the channel, and an adequate number of guns in all directions landward from which it might be assailed ; that it shall be capable of resisting an attack made in force and with deliberation ; that it shall contain, in security, the necessary stores and munitions, and accommodate the garrison needed for its defence. These necessary conditions, and some others of minor importance, may be secured with certainty by enlarging the fort somewhat beyond the present outline ; giving such directions to the faces as will control the channel and surrounding country and permit mutual flanking fires ; excavating a ditch ; elevating ramparts, and constructing other obstacles to escalade, and other means of shelter from cannonade and bombardment.

It is probable the sum estimated by the above mentioned board will be adequate to the accomplishment of these modifications and improvements. At any rate, that sum is regarded as sufficient to place a new work in condition for efficient action. Some surveys of the spot (which could not be commenced till within a short time) will soon be reported, which will allow a more particular estimate to be made. The sum stated would be a proper appropriation for the first year. Such progress has now been made

in the fort near Detroit as to warrant the commencement of this ; and it is hoped the state of the treasury may permit our breaking ground at the opening of the coming spring.

I think it not inappropriate to state in this connexion, that the commencement of labors upon the fort near Detroit was delayed, in spite of urgent and impatient efforts on the part of the government agents, for three years, before the clear title to the site required by law could be secured. That work is now, however, though not completed as regards accommodation for garrison, &c., in a state of strength and efficiency.

Estimated cost of rebuilding Fort Gratiot, \$50,000.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your most obedient,
JOS. G. TOTTEN,
Colonel and Chief Engineer.

P. S. The Senate resolution is herewith returned.

